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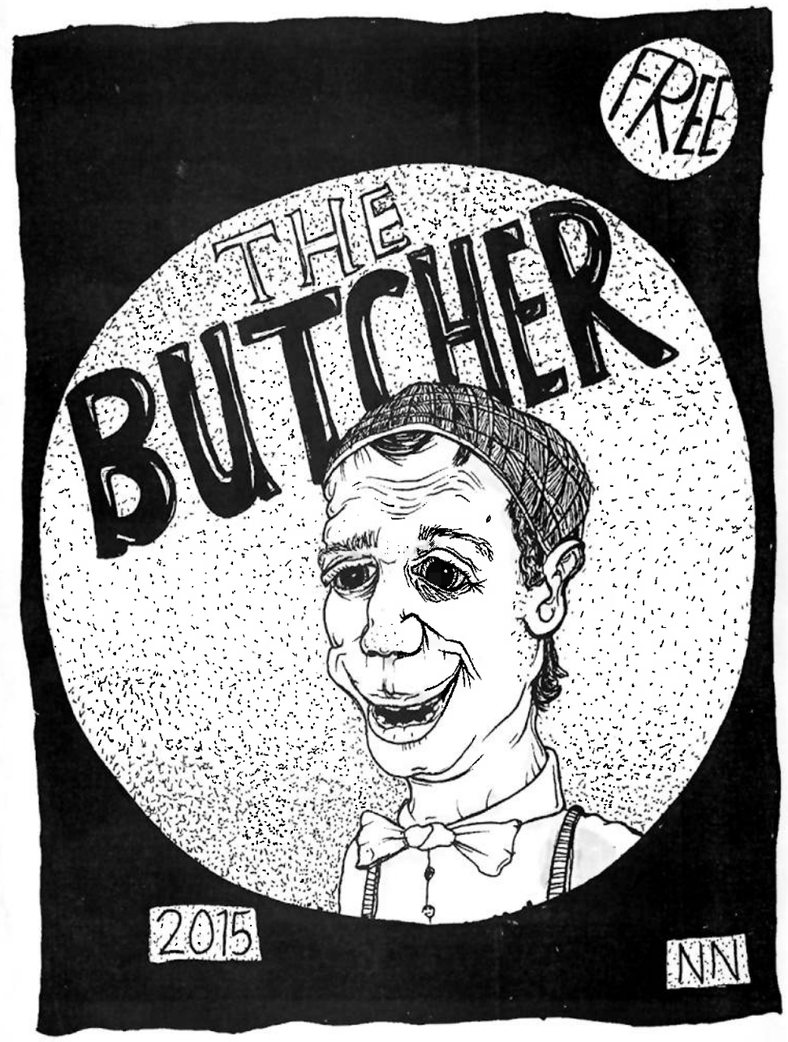
FREE
THE BUTCHER
2015
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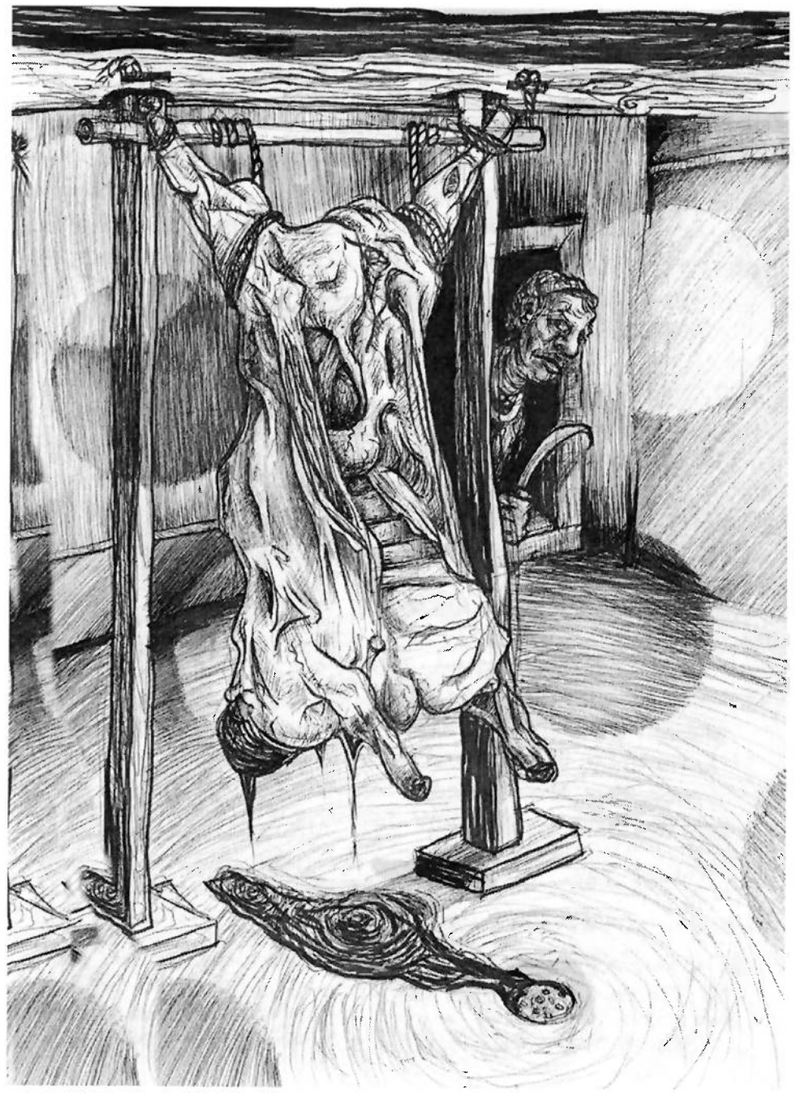
"Alright echo." Sunflowers voice drifted from the smokey back room "Catch Ya later." I was sitting on the couch, packing my tie-dyed messenger bag with what I would need that day at work. The couch, once white — now a motley crew of spilled wines and burn marks, was hard to get up from. It had been found on the side of the road, like almost all the furniture in this hippy Collective. The old Wooden door that acted as our table had been sanded down, lacquered, and was where we met for dinner most nights. The T.V. found on the side of the road had been gutted and turned into the focal art piece of the living room. Along with Sunflower and me, there was Trinity, Dawn, Ziggy, David, and Snowphish. Our 2-story, dilapidated, weathered house lived with us 4 miles out of town on the 66. We got "lucky" some would say, I would say the universe looks out for hers; Trin-

ity. *had inherited the house from an ailing great-aunt or something. The front yard was a collection of :art and weeds - as well as the 4 x 4 attempt at an herb garden. (the one in the backyard was doing better though.) We had been a group for a little over a year, and I was pretty sure we were doing great. There were no major contentions and the group got along wonderfully. I mean we all had the same ideals; we were vegans, lovers, and outdoorsy types. Much more enlightened than the society we had to interact with on a daily basis. I mean you can't do as much ACid as we did and not be enlightend.∃

Previous vegan-turned-corporate punks WHO HAD PISSED Off Ed. THE FLOOR WAS SLIGHTLY TILTED so all the blood emptied into a drain in the center of the room MY head suddenly felt 5 Pounds lighter and MY vision was obscured by SPOTS. I focused on Planting MY feet on the Ground, trying to disguise my weakness. Goosebumps SHOT UP MY ARM, Caused by the cold and florescent lighting. The flickering lights seemed to make it colder, as if any heat the room had was being sucked up by the unnatural glowing tubes in the ceiling



I had no choice in taking this job. All the entrepeneurial ventures our house had thrown together had failed. We had three boxes of tye-dye shirts that doubled as our coffee table; that was aside from the dozens we all wore and from which we made NO profit. Our gardening never panned out beyond a few measly carrots and hundreds of zucchini. Even though we had purchased a $50 scale and $500 hydroponic system, our group didn't have the will-power to stop smoking long enough to make a profit. I had sold my '80 Volkswagen Rabbit after my father cut me off last year, there was no option left. I had no income and I was already blown that month's allowance on my ticket to Burning Man. I knew life was going to change when I recieved that phone call;

my dad never called. unless it was with bad news.

"Steve, son I-"

"Echo Dad, my name is Echo."

"Steve. You graduated college 2 years ago and you've done absolutely nothing since then. I know this isn't going to be easy for you, but I'm cutting you off and-"

"DAD!"

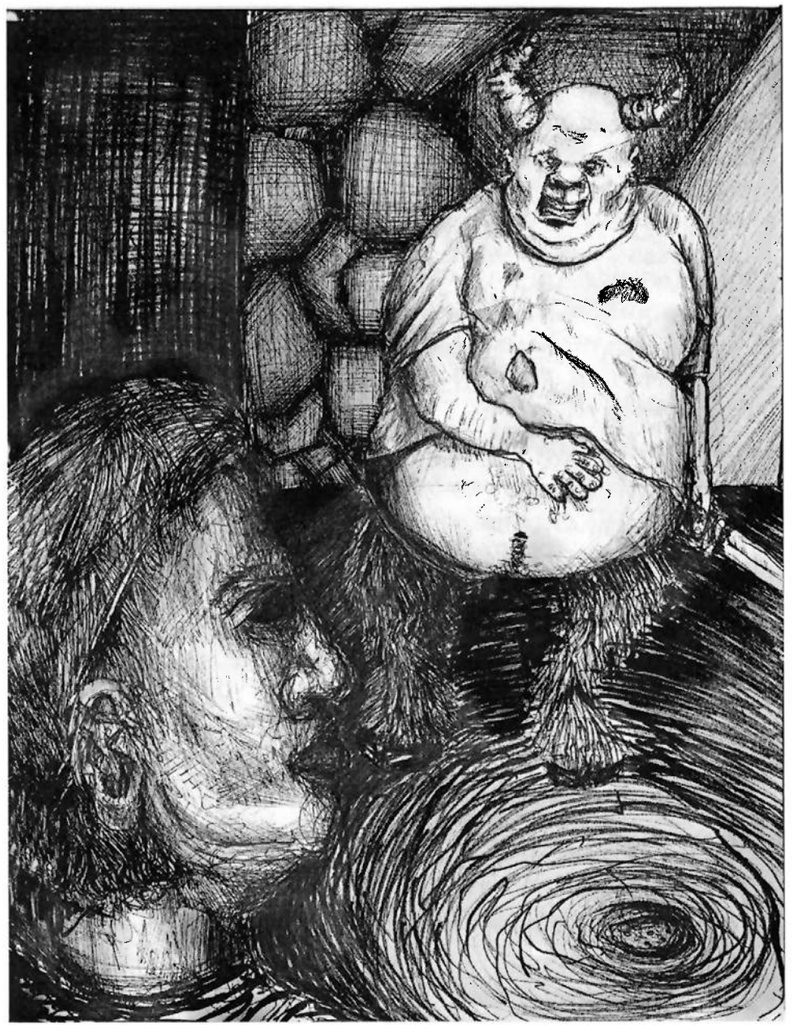
"STOP! I told you a degree in."

I Hung up. He was always ragging on me about my path at Kansas University, a B.A. in Creative writing with a minor in environmental sustainability. I chose what I was passionate about

Because I never wanted to end up like my old man. Angry at life because he spent 8 hours a day, 5 days a week trapped at his accounting firm. He did well, monetarily-wise anyways, but money isn't what it's all about. Life is about happiness, experience and.... well anyway, that was 14 month. ago when my father had cut me off. September is when he called to say he had found a job for me if I wanted it. (oh how patronizing, Yet right he was, I did need a job. Badly.)

My thoughts were interrupted by Ed as he started to explain the different cuts of meat for each animal I had to memorize. "... and if you forget just look at this poster." He pointed to the far corner of the freezer, a poster I hadn't noticed before hung nice and neat showing each animal and which part of its body was which cut. Next, we got started; Ed showed me how to cut the portion of meat which I would then stick through a grinder to become ground beef. The serrated edge of the knife I was to use gleamed in the freezer a ray of sunshine came through the cracked-open freezer door. Like a demon with a pitchfork in my hand, I stood before the meat. Ed had all but sprouted horns and become the manifestation of Satan. Ed. chuckled, satisfied that I would be able to perform the task at hand adequately. Apparently not sensing my anxiety he said in a low voice "Lets get started

The next sixty seconds seemed to last an eternity. Ed's DARK eyes staring



Expectantly fro my hand holding the blade to the skinned cow swaying in the breeze. Despite my goosebumps and the temperature in the freezer I could feel beads of sweat breaking out on my forehead and temple. Was I really going to do this? My own eyes drifted from the meat with its white clumps of fat to the other white clump of fat in the room, Ed's stomach. They were equidistant from my blade and I wouldn't doubt if Ed's belly was softer then the cows. My eyes raised from his portly stomach up to his face, his tongue licking his lips, his eyes darting from my blade to the cow to my blade to the cow. My hand was shaking and my mind was reeling, could I actually do this? live a life on the lam or spend the rest of my unforeseeable future slicing lambs? I raised the blade to what was probably an over-dramatic height over my head and swung down with a rage I wasn't aware I had. -THWOCK- the blade had wedged itself a good three or 4 inches deep into the shoulder of the cow and tears welled up in my eyes. Not because I was disturbed at what I had done... because it had felt so good. The rage towards my father, my shitty room mates, toward my girlfriend (who I knew was sleeping with David) towards all who questioned my veganism, toward the man, towards taxes. I ripped the blade out and swung again at the same spot, with just as much gusto. As if I had nicked a water ballon, I was suddenly

Sprayed with dark red blood. My lips, my arms and mostly my apron were covered. I felt **baptized in blood.** With a shine in my eye I looked over at Ed. He looked my way with the biggest shit eating grin I had ever seen come from someone who so narrowly avoided their painful death. That first afternoon I don't think I've ever had a more mind-expanding experience. Deconstructing that hunk of meat into pieces ready for consumption was something I'll never forget. The resistance of the sinew and muscle as the blade sawed back and forth. The muscle visibly tearing strand by strand followed by the smell of fresh blood as it hit the air; the scent strong enough to make my mouth taste like I was sucking on pennies. After hours of sawing and grunting and laughing I had a pile of meat cut so perfect I believe I could have pieced it back together again. At the end of my first day, Ed had proven himself to be correct, my apron was no longer white, it was varying shades of red and maroon. My first shift was over and I was washing up in the bathroom, the water from my facing coming off a dark pink. I have not eaten meat since AUGUST 2009, I've been vegan for six years, and here I am working in a butcher shop. I've been trying to justify it to myself all week. As I smiled to myself in the mirror, my teeth looking much whiter in contrast to my red lips and skin, I realized I no longer need to justify myself. TO Anyone. My roommates would never find out about My job if I didn't

WANT THEM TO, they wouldn't come to a butcher shop. I wouldn't need a therapist as long as I had this job. My nose had long stopped noticing the copper smell of raw meat and the only sensation I felt now, aside from a sense of relief was sore arms. CUTTING INTO dead animals all day had made me hyperaware of my own muscles, I could feel where my muscles attached to my bones and the pain radiated from there; hunks of hanging meat are not light weight